

Good afternoon, ladies and gentlemen of the Connecticut legislature. My name is Sara Senft and I am 33 years old. I am a sister, daughter, aunt...and an adult on the Autism spectrum.

Last year, at age 32, I was diagnosed with Asperger Syndrome—amongst other conditions that frequently co-occur—after years of struggle and not making full use of my gifts. This, I believe, is due to few and inadequate transition and adult resources. Even with the help of a diagnosis, I struggle daily because of insufficient adult autism spectrum resources and the underdevelopment of resources that do exist.

One of my greatest struggles is with finding and sustaining appropriate employment. When I do successfully apply and interview for a job, it rarely goes well or lasts long because my social, learning, and communication impairments significantly interfere with learning job tasks, performing them, and socially navigating the work environment. One example is that people on the Autism spectrum tend to be very literal in speech and comprehension. Case in point: When I was a girl, I thought that 'extra body' on a shampoo bottle meant that I could use it to wash my body.

Due to my ongoing difficulties with employment and other independent living skills, I am facing numerous negative consequences. For example, I am thousands of dollars in credit card debt and nearly every month I worry about how to pay one bill or another. If there were more resources that suited my needs as an Autistic adult, my debt load would be smaller and how to pay my bills would not be such a concern.

In closing, I urge you to consider my story and the other stories shared today. Children and younger teenagers currently diagnosed will eventually become older teenagers and adults, and will continue to need help to make full use of their potential and participate

more in life. Don't let apparent intelligence and competence fool you—even “high-functioning” people like me can struggle significantly and therefore need support too. Thousands of teenagers and adults across the state—like me—will benefit from additional and enhanced supports, such as initiatives, programs, and advocacy to help the public better understand later adolescence and adulthood issues and to encourage wider inclusion. Thank you for your time and consideration.